Thailand is the Chair country to the TNC and 11 meetings of TNC have been held. The 12th BIMSTEC TNC meeting is being held in Colombo from 25-28 July, 2006. In the negotiations, consensus among the seven members has been reached on most of the text of FTA in goods. Consensus has also been reached on the size of the sensitive list and modality for tariff liberalisation.

However, on Rules of Origin, while good progress has been made in the text, no consensus has yet been reached on the general rule and the derogations for product specific rules.

(b) Since the decision on any issue is required to be taken through consensus, the Government is discussing the outstanding issues with an open mind and undertaking due consultations with stakeholders.

Kaman Aman Setu

*55. SHRI RAJKUMAR DHOOT: Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Kaman Aman Setu was launched by engineers of Indian Army, in the presence of Pakistan Army, on 11th February, 2006;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) the utility of this bridge in improving Indo-Pak relations; and

(d) the number of persons who have made use of this bridge, so far?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): (a) to (d) The Kaman Aman Setu, a bailey bridge, was constructed by the Indian Army on the Line of Control, in Uri Sector, to facilitate the running of Srinagar-Muzaffarabad Bus service between India and Pakistan. As a part of a set of proposals for confidence building with Pakistan, the Srinagar-Muzaffarabad Bus service was inaugurated on 7th April, 2005 by the Prime Minister. However, consequent to October, 2005 earthquake, the Kaman Aman Setu suffered extensive damge and the Srinagar-Muzaffarabad Bus service was disrupted. The bridge was re-launched on 11th February, 2006 by the Indian Army and re-inaugurated on 20th February, 2006 by the Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir.

The operationalisation of the Srinagar-Muzaffarabad bus service is a landmark event. It has been widely welcomed all over, especially in Jammu

and Kashmir. The bus has facilitated interaction among divided families on both sides of the Line of Control by enabling them to cross over and meet their relatives across the Line of Control. The bus also carries the message of friendship and brotherhood and the need to transcend borders for the sake of our people's prosperity and well-being.

The total number of persons who have crossed this bridge in bus till 6th July, 2006, is 468 Indian nationals and 632 Pakistani nationals.

Illegal Farming of Opium

†*56. SHRI MOTILAL VORA:
MS. SUSHILA TIRIYA:

Will the Minister of HOME AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether according to an intelligence report, in order to overcome their funds crisis the maoists of West Bengal are abetting farmers of Bankura and West Midnapur districts to grow opium;

(b) if so, whether Government have issued any directions to the State Government to curb illegal farming of opium;

(c) whether it is also a fact that smuggling of opium is taking place through Nepal border, and

(d) if so, step taken by Government to curb the same?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF HOME AFFAIRS (SHRI S. REGUPATHY): (a) and (b) No such report has been received by the Government.

(c) Available reports received by the Government do not indicate such a phenomenon.

(d) The Government has taken a number of steps to check smuggling/ trafficking of narcoties drugs within the country as well as across the borders. These include:—

(1) Strict surveillance and enforcement at important and export points, land borders, airports, foreign post offices etc.

(2) Intensive preventive and interdiction efforts along known drug routes.

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.